



Stephanie Selfe

Credit Risk Executive: Commercial Property Finance
Absa



Q Where did your corporate finance journey begin, and what led you to pursue a career in the space that you are in?

A I have always been passionate about property. I am a valuer by profession, and I started my career in the Property Risk team at Investec Private Bank. It is there that I qualified as a valuer, and learnt some interesting lessons in banking in 2008/2009! I spent some time working in the directly-held property investment arm of Investec, and then joined Absa in 2012. I headed up the Commercial Property Finance Valuations team for Absa from 2017 to 2020, overseeing the function across both South Africa and our African Regional Operations, allowing me to learn about different markets and the nuances and challenges of each, as well as having the opportunity to travel to some of our neighbouring countries.

I joined the Corporate and Investment Banking Credit function as a Credit Risk Executive for Commercial Property Finance at the beginning of 2021, with a portfolio spanning property developers and investors, as well as listed clients. This has exposed me to deal structuring and risk management, as well as understanding how our clients view the property assets that I would previously only have valued. Additionally, I have enjoyed the opportunity to be exposed to credit for clients outside of my core specialisation.

Q Did you have a mentor at any point in your career? If so, who were they and what did you learn from them?

A I have had mentors from across both Credit and our Front Office whom I look up to, and whose careers and contributions to the organisation I greatly admire. I have been privileged enough to have been able to lean on

these mentors for advice, feedback and support in times of turmoil.

Specifically, I have been lucky enough to work with several strong women throughout my career, who have been a real example of what you can achieve as a woman in a corporate. They have provided guidance and supported me, and have provided the challenge, the sponsorship and the platform to grow and make my mark within the Bank.

Q What was the toughest deal you ever worked on and why?

A There have been so many interesting deals on which I have had the privilege to work. Each transaction is unique, impacted by the property fundamentals of the security, the structure proposed, and the client's requirements and timing needs. Working together with internal stakeholders as a deal team becomes key in providing the right solution for a client, and for the Bank.

One deal that stands out was a multi-jurisdictional syndicated loan, where we were working with credit and lending teams across various countries. We had to get comfortable not only with the structure of the transaction and the legal risk, but also with the property risk in each of the countries in which our security was located. It was an opportunity for learning, as well as to connect with colleagues from across the continent.

Q What, in your opinion, is the hardest part of structuring deals?

A I would say that the hardest part of our role in credit would be balancing what the client wants or needs with managing the risk associated with the transaction. It's about being able to manage both our internal and external stakeholders, and the ability to deliver results in tight timelines.

Q What piece of advice would you give a young woman joining your team?

A Never let someone else dim your light, nor doubt your ability to contribute. Working in a corporate can be hard, but be confident in what you have to offer and use your voice. You drive your success, so put your hand up for opportunities that will give you exposure and experience, even if it is outside of your core role – this will provide you with the challenge and stretch you need, as well as an opportunity to develop new networks and connections. Find a group of people you trust and who are invested in your success, that you can rely on to give you honest and constructive feedback. Give support to others where you can, and take the time to grow and support other women.

FUN FACTS

Current book on your nightstand: I always have a good *who-done-it* on my nightstand. At the moment, I am reading the latest Robert Galbraith, and I can't put it down.

Preferred music genre: I enjoy all classical music – I find it to be calming and I have endless appreciation for the time, dedication and practice it must have taken to become such masters of their craft.

Preferred holiday destination: An island holiday is always top of my list. Mauritius is a wonderful place to take a young family – sun, sand and sleep is the perfect recipe for a holiday!

Three words that your colleagues would use to describe you: Dedicated, passionate and caring. 🇿🇦